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ABSTRACT

Education is the largest, most broadly based enterprise in America. Education, although a national priority, is a state responsibility under local control. This brochure highlights the United States Department of Education's responsibilities, which generally fall into the following six areas: (1) providing national leadership and building partnerships to address critical issues in American education; (2) serving as a national clearinghouse of good ideas; (3) helping families pay for college; (4) helping local communities and schools meet the most pressing needs of their students; (5) preparing students for employment in a changing economy; and (6) ensuring nondiscrimination by recipients of federal education funds. Ways to access the department's online library on the Internet are listed. Two figures are included. (LMI)

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U.S. Department of Education

How We Help America Learn:

A Summary of Major Activities

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How We Help America Learn:

A Summary of Major Activities

Overview

Education is the largest, most broadly-based enterprise in America. Nearly 70 million Americans are involved in education as students or teachers from preschool education through postdoctoral research. In an era of international economic competition and increasing use of technology, education is more important than ever. The link between education and our economic competitiveness is clear. In 1992, the average annual earnings for those with a college degree were almost twice those of people with only a high school diploma, and more than two-and-a-half times greater than those who had not graduated from high school. In this decade, 89 percent of the jobs being created require some form of post secondary training — and virtually all require a high school diploma.

Education is a national priority, but a state responsibility under local control. The nation spends about $500 billion a year on education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. State, local, and private expenditures account for about 92 percent of this spending, while the federal government contributes about eight percent. Although a small share of the national investment in education, the federal contribution helps about one out of two students pay for their postsecondary education and about four out of five disadvantaged elementary and secondary school students get extra help to learn the basics.

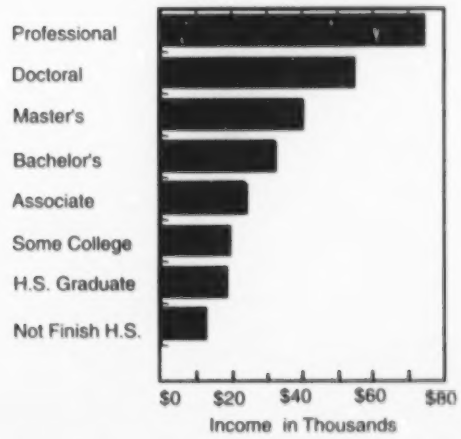
The responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education generally fall into six important areas: (1) providing national leadership and building partnerships to address critical issues in American education; (2) serving as a national clearinghouse of good ideas; (3) helping families pay for college; (4) helping local communities and schools meet the most pressing needs of their students; (5) preparing students for employment in a changing economy; and (6) ensuring non-discrimination. In addition, the Department is improving its management in order to serve its customers more effectively.

The Department's elementary and secondary programs serve 15,000 local school districts and almost 50 million students attending over 100,000 schools. Its student financial aid programs help about seven million students annually attend college.

The U.S. Department of Education currently administers about $33 billion, or about 2 percent of all federal spending. The Department's elementary and secondary education programs annually serve 15,000 local school districts and almost 50 million students attending more than 84,000 public schools and more than 24,000 private schools. Department programs also provide grant, loan, and work-study assistance to approximately seven million postsecondary students each year, which is about one out of every two college students. Over the past 20 years, the

Department's student financial aid programs have helped approximately 40 million students attend college. An additional four million adults receive assistance annually to become literate and upgrade their skills.

AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION: 1992



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

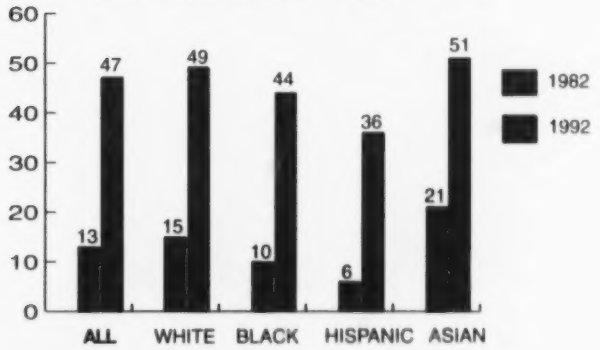
The Department and its programs are administratively lean. The Department, as of March 1995, had fewer than 5,000 full time employees, making it the smallest cabinet agency, and it will be further streamlined to fewer than 4,750 employees by 1999. In contrast, a mid-size university such as Princeton has approximately 4,700 total staff and 6,500 students. Department staffing has fallen significantly from the approximately 7,700 employed in 1979 by the former Office of Education and related agencies within the old Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This has made the Department the most efficient of the 14 cabinet agencies, with only one employee for every $6 million in budget authority.

I. National Leadership and Partnerships to Address Critical Issues in American Education

Various secretaries of education have highlighted contemporary education problems that need to be addressed across America. In 1983, former Secretary of Education Terrel Bell issued ***A Nation At Risk,*** which galvanized public concern about education when it warned that low student achievement levels were threatening the nation's international competitiveness. In response, many states and communities raised their high school graduation requirements and the proportion of high school graduates taking the core curriculum recommended in the report (four years of English, three years of social studies, three years of science, three years of math) more than tripled between 1982 and 1992.

In 1993, Secretary Richard Riley identified critical issues that need the nation's attention: improved safety and discipline, strengthened basic and advanced skills tied to challenging academic standards for every student, better teaching, greater parental involvement, greater connection

INCREASE IN U.S. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES TAKING THE NUMBER OF COURSES RECOMMENDED IN A NATION AT RISK, BY RACE/ETHNICITY: BETWEEN 1982 AND 1992*



Courses recommended in *A Nation at Risk*, including 4 units in English, 3 units in social studies, 3 units in science, and 3 units in math, where a unit represents a year-long course. Computer science was not included because few students took it in 1982.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1994.

between school and work, better access for students to technology, and better access to financial aid for students to attend college and receive training.

Partnership building has included the creation of a national "Family Involvement Partnership for Learning." The Partnership is not a federal program, but rather a long-term partnership with states, communities and more than 130 national organizations that represent parents, schools, employers and religious organizations. As part of their commitment to the partnership, more than 30 religious organizations representing 75 percent of all organized religious groups in America have pledged their support to helping families help their children learn.

II. A National Clearinghouse of Good Ideas

The original U.S. Department of Education was created in 1867 and collected information on schools and teaching that would help the states establish efficient school systems. This emphasis on promoting educational excellence by collecting and sharing information remains an important role.

In order to help state and local decision makers improve their schools, the Department shares the latest research findings and information on education with parents, teachers, school board members, policy makers, and the general public. For example, in 1994 the Department published ***Strong Families, Strong Schools***, which summarizes 30 years of research on strengthening family involvement in education. The Department also funds 10 regional educational laboratories that develop materials and provide assistance to states and local educators based on the most recent knowledge about improving teaching and learning.

Since 1966, the Department's Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) has distributed education information on subjects ranging from elementary and early childhood education, to education for disabled and gifted children, to rural and urban education. ERIC, the world's largest database on education, is available through libraries and is used by more than 500,000 people each year. ERIC information is also available by calling 1-800-LET-ERIC or via the Internet through the AskERIC Virtual Library (ericir.syr.edu or http://ericir.syr.edu) and through the AskERIC online question-answering service (askeric@ericir.syr.edu).

Hundreds of education resources are also featured in the U.S. Department of Education's Online Library (gopher.ed.gov or http://www.ed.gov). This Internet-based library is visited more than 17,000 times a week. The Department also hosts several online discussions, or "listservs," about education improvement.

The Department also holds monthly satellite town meetings to share effective ideas about solving current problems in education. Led by Secretary Riley and Deputy Secretary Kunin, these town meetings are broadcast to education, community, and business leaders and parents through hundreds of satellite down-links as well as on open access television channels in most major cities and the Discovery Channel, which reaches 60 million homes. The town meetings are supplemented by ***Community Update***, a newsletter with a distribution of over 100,000 on promising solutions to education problems that communities face. Communities can find out how to be a downlink site and receive materials helpful to local school improvement by calling 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Many of the nation's effective school improvement efforts have been based on research originally funded by federal education research programs.

A wide variety of competitive grant programs also support efforts by states, schools and school districts, community groups, and postsecondary institutions to develop and demonstrate proven innovative approaches to solving problems in the schools and improving the effectiveness of education. These programs range from very broad authorities such as the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE) and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), which sponsor innovation in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, to specific demonstrations of promising strategies of national importance such as the Charter Schools program, which provides seed money for the development of charter schools in states that have enacted charter school laws.

Ensuring that students have better access to technology is an important new focus of the Department's efforts to promote effective changes in educational practices. The new $40 million Technology in Education program will

help schools make the transition to the information age by providing information, research, and assistance to educators and promoting partnerships that will link schools and communities with communications and software companies. The $30 million Star Schools Program supports distance education technologies to help students in 5,000 schools learn to challenging academic standards.

The Department also supports research on effective educational practices for all students and monitors the performance of the American education system through the collection of statistics and evaluation data. For example, the Department supports long-term research and development through its university-based education research centers. Many of the nation's effective school improvement efforts have been based on research originally funded by federal education research programs.

The Department's National Center for Education Statistics annually publishes the primary reference volume on education in the nation—***The Digest of Education Statistics***—a comprehensive review of education statistics on elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and adult education. The Center also publishes ***The Condition of Education***, an annual report that includes information on enrollment rates, dropout rates, trends in academic achievement, and education spending. The Department also funds the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which for more than 20 years has served as "the Nation's Report Card." NAEP is the only nationally representative assessment of what our nation's students know and can do and is the primary source of data on educational achievement in the core academic subjects. Since 1990, NAEP has also collected and published state-level data, which allows participating states to track how their students are performing, both over time and relative to other states.

The Department also has applied its growing understanding of effective policy and practice to evaluating and improving its own programs. For example, findings from assessments of vocational education and Chapter 1 have figured prominently in the reforms reflected in the reauthorizations of these programs.

III. Helping Families Pay for College

Approximately 45 percent of the Department's budget is devoted to postsecondary education, most of which is used for student financial aid. The history of federal financial assistance to college students goes back to the GI Bill of 1944, which served as the springboard to the middle class for millions of American servicemen and their families. More than 12.4 million veterans attended college on the GI Bill between 1944 and 1989. Millions more received federal assistance to pay college costs through the 1958 National Defense Student Loan program. Subsequently, the Higher Education Act—-passed in 1965 and reauthorized half a dozen times since then-—served as the framework for the current set of federal grant, loan, and work-study programs aimed at helping poor and

middle-class students of all ages pursue postsecondary education. Today, about 75 percent of all student financial aid in the nation is funded by the federal government.

The $6.2 billion Pell Grant program makes grants averaging over $1,500 to nearly four million postsecondary students annually. Most Pell recipients are from families earning less than $20,000 a year.

The Department also operates two major student loan programs for which almost all students are eligible. The first is the new William D. Ford Direct Loan Program, which lends funds directly from the federal government to postsecondary students and provides a wide variety of repayment options, including income-contingent repayment. The direct loan program reduces bureaucracy and cuts out the middlemen in the student loan process while also providing more options and better service to students and postsecondary institutions. Along with changes in the older guaranteed loan program, direct lending is expected to save the taxpayers $6.8 billion by the year 2000. It will also save students about $2 billion through reduced interest rates over five years. The second major student loan program is the Federal Family Education Loan Program, which since 1965 has provided loan subsidies and guarantees against default on loans made to students by private lenders. Together, the loan programs currently make nearly $26 billion in loans to about 6.5 million postsecondary students and their families.

The Department's campus-based aid programs give postsecondary institutions great flexibility in making need-based financial assistance available to students. These programs include the low-interest Federal Perkins Loans Program; the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Program, which gives additional grant assistance to needy college students; and the Federal Work-Study Program, which supports mostly part-time on-campus jobs allowing 700,000 students to earn about $1,000 annually. Each of these programs requires matching funds from participating institutions.

Federal student financial aid programs have helped to make college affordable for middle- and low-income families and have contributed to dramatic growth in college enrollments at a time when education and training beyond high school are increasingly important to individual self-sufficiency and the nation's productivity. Between 1964 and 1993, college enrollment nearly tripled (from five million to 14 million), the percentage of high school graduates who go on to college increased by one-third (from 48 percent to 63 percent), and college enrollment rates for minority high school graduates increased by nearly two-thirds (from 39 percent to 62 percent). Federal support, particularly for low- and middle-income students, helped make this growth possible by easing the financial burden on families.

Because of concern about high default rates and inad-

equate loan collection in the student aid programs, Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have taken actions to reduce defaults-including management reforms and increased attention to weeding out unsound postsecondary institutions. As a result, default rates decreased from a high of 22 percent in 1991 to 15 percent in 1994. At the same time, the dollar value of defaults declined from $3.6 billion in 1991 to $2 billion in 1994. In addition, Department collections of defaulted student loans rose to $500 million in 1994. Poor-performing institutions also are being dealt with: since 1994 the Department has eliminated over 600 postsecondary education institutions, primarily proprietary schools, from the student loan programs for persistent, excessive default rates.

IV. Helping Local Communities and Schools Meet the Needs of Their Students

The Department delivers almost $13 billion to states and school districts for elementary and secondary education, primarily through formula-based grant programs designed to support improvements in basic and academic skills geared to challenging standards, school safety, parent involvement, and teacher quality, and to help states and school districts meet the special needs of schools and students.

Just six authorities account for about 95 percent of the Department's funding to elementary and secondary education: the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development program, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program, Impact Aid, and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act is the Department's flagship education program to help parents, teachers, and community leaders improve their own schools by raising academic standards; addressing safety, discipline and basic skills; attracting and training better teachers; and strengthening parent involvement. Funded at $400 million in 1995, this program provides great flexibility to schools, school districts and states to develop and implement actions locally, based on their own challenging standards for every student. Funds may be used for a broad range of activities aimed at ensuring that teaching, discipline, use of technology, and assessments will help students reach challenging standards. Accountability is based on improved student learning.

The Department is administering the Goals 2000 initiative with little paperwork and with extensive flexibility: the state application form is four pages; there are no regulations; extensive waivers are available to assist states and school districts in implementing their school improvement efforts. As of April 1995, 47 states and eight territories had applied for and received first-year Goals 2000 funds to develop their state-wide reform plans.

The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), passed by Congress in 1994, reauthorized the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which at $10 billion is the federal government's largest investment in elementary and secondary education. The ESEA addresses four key priorities: (1) ensuring access to a quality education for our most disadvantaged students so they can learn the basics and improve achievement geared to challenging academic standards; (2) achieving safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools; (3) ensuring that today's and tomorrow's teachers have the training and skills necessary to help all children reach challenging academic standards; and (4) assisting states by alleviating burdens caused by federal activities, such as federally owned land that provides no tax revenues.

The Title I program, established in 1965, directs about $7 billion to helping more than six million disadvantaged children in more than 50,000 schools nationwide—about half of all the schools in the country. Most of the funds go to high-poverty schools where students score at much lower levels than their peers in low-poverty schools on achievement tests-levels that contribute greatly to high dropout rates, illiteracy, and poor employment prospects. High-poverty schools use Title I funds to help close this gap. As reauthorized in 1994, Title I emphasizes high academic standards and accelerated learning in the core academic subjects rather than the low expectations often found in remedial instruction. High-poverty schools are encouraged to develop schoolwide programs aimed at raising the basic and academic performance of all students, not just those eligible for Title I. Required federal testing has been replaced by locally- and state-designed accountability. Moreover, for the first time, schools may seek waivers of statutory or regulatory provisions that may impede their efforts to improve student achievement and learning.

Among college-bound students, SAT scores increased across all race/ethnic groups from 1980 to 1993, with minority students earning the largest increases. For example, the average math score increased from 466 in 1980 to 478 in 1993 (a 12-point gain), recovering much of the ground lost during the 1970's. Dropout rates for 16- to 24-year-olds declined from 17 percent in 1967 to 11 percent in 1993, and the dropout rate for blacks fell even more dramatically, from 29 percent to 14 percent.

Minority students achieved substantial gains in science, math, and reading between the 1970's and 1992, reducing the gap between minority and white student achievement. For 9-year-olds, for example, the achievement gap between black and white students' scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress narrowed by 32 percent in science, 18 percent in math, and 25 percent in reading.

While achievement of disadvantaged students has risen dramatically in the years since Title I was enacted, much more needs to be done to keep up with these changing times.

High-quality and well trained teachers are essential to any improvement of education. The Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development program supports locally-guided teacher training in the core academic subjects. The program distributes $320 million to states and school districts to help ensure that teachers are prepared to teach to the high academic standards states are now developing. The focus will be on local principals, teachers, and parents deciding what professional development is needed to improve their schools. No longer will professional development rely on programs that lack depth, quality, and a sustained commitment to assist teachers in the development of their skills to significantly improve instructional practice.

The third major priority in ESEA, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program, responds to the continuing crisis of violence and drugs in our schools by supporting comprehensive school- and community-based drug abuse and violence prevention programs. This $500 million program gives school districts the flexibility to design their own programs to reflect local needs. Activities may include conflict resolution and peer mediation training, substance abuse prevention education, service learning, the purchase of metal detectors, and the hiring of security personnel.

The $730 million Impact Aid Program is the major program assisting states and local communities impacted by federal activities, such as the presence of a military base or federal ownership of a significant proportion of local property. In these districts, the federal presence reduces the local property tax base that ordinarily serves as a major source of school funding. Impact Aid is intended to help replace this lost revenue.

Like the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the reauthorized ESEA couples flexibility with accountability for academic achievement. This new flexibility means less fragmented, categorical approaches, more school-wide approaches, fewer reporting requirements, and broad waiver authority. The emphasis is on effectiveness and efficiency, not paperwork.

Since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted in 1975, students with disabilities have achieved substantial gains. While in 1975 more than one million children with disabilities were excluded from school, today all children with disabilities are in educational programs and the number of children placed in costly state institutions has decreased dramatically. High school graduation rates have increased significantly, and 57 percent of youth with disabilities are competitively employed within five years of graduation from high school.

The U.S. Department of Education also helps states and school districts meet their responsibility to provide a free appropriate public education for children with disabilities:

Two landmark federal court decisions in the early 1970's established the constitutional right of children with disabilities to equal educational opportunity. In 1975 a federal law, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was enacted to provide a framework for appropriately serving these children as well as federal financial assistance to help pay for their education. Today the Department allocates nearly $3 billion through three state formula grant programs intended to help states meet the developmental and educational needs of over five million children with disabilities from birth through age 21.

V. *Preparing Students for Employment and Keeping Up with the Changing Economy*

A growing understanding of the relationship between our educational performance and our competitiveness in the global economy has led to a new emphasis on the connections between school and work, and a new appreciation of the importance of vocational education and opportunities for lifelong learning.

Several U.S. Department of Education programs respond to this new emphasis and help young people and adults develop the knowledge and skills they need for careers that often demand ever-higher levels of education and training. The 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act, administered jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Labor, provides seed money to every state and to interested communities to develop and launch a comprehensive school-to-work system. These systems will combine school-based and work-based learning with activities designed to prepare students for a first job. Funded at $250 million in 1995, the School-to-Work program is specifically designed to sunset after five years.

Perkins Act Vocational Education State grants provide nearly $1 billion to help pay for vocational training programs at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Funds may be used in accordance with state-developed plans to support activities ranging from pre-vocational courses for secondary school students to retraining adults in response to changing technological and labor market conditions. The Department is also proposing to align the Perkins program more closely with the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, while tightening accountability requirements and consolidating categorical programs to increase state and local flexibility.

Another area of significant federal support to assist states in preparing individuals for employment is Vocational Rehabilitation. The Department provides more than $2 billion a year in Vocational Rehabilitation state grants that assist one million adults with disabilities, most of them severe, in achieving successful employment outcomes and independent living. As a result of this program, about 200,000 individuals with disabilities are placed each year in jobs in the competitive labor market or become self-employed. About 80 percent of those individuals

report that their own income, rather than public assistance or family income, is their primary source of support.

In addition to these programs aimed at preparing students and individuals with disabilities for changing employment opportunities, the Department supports literacy and basic skills training through a combination of state formula and competitive grant programs. The Adult Education Act State grant program provides about $270 million to help approximately four million educationally disadvantaged adults achieve literacy, certification of high school equivalency, and English language proficiency. The $100 million Even Start program delivers formula grants to states for the support of intergenerational literacy projects combining early childhood education for children and literacy training for their parents.

VI. Ensuring Nondiscrimination by Recipients of Federal Education Funds

The Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is responsible for enforcing a variety of federal statutes prohibiting discrimination by recipients of federal education funds on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, or age. OCR focuses on encouraging voluntary compliance with civil rights laws by providing policy guidance, staff training, and technical assistance. In its work, it forges relationships and communication between those enforcing civil rights and others whose business is the promotion of the best education possible for all of our students. As a result, most of OCR's work is nonadversarial. For example, OCR handles more than 5,000 complaints a year. More than 95 percent of these are resolved by agreement without the need for court or administrative hearing proceedings.

The Office for Civil Rights focuses on encouraging voluntary compliance with civil rights laws by providing policy guidance, staff training, and technical assistance.

VII. Improving Management to Better Serve Its Customers

In the past few years, substantial strides have been made toward transforming the agency into a more effective and efficient organization that can better serve its customers. The Department has established a clear strategic agenda defined by four priorities: (1) helping all students reach challenging academic standards so that they are prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment; (2) creating comprehensive school-to-work opportunities systems in every state; (3) ensuring access to high-quality postsecondary education and life-long learning; and (4) transforming the Department into a high-performance organization. These four priorities are the framework for the Department's activities, including our management and regulatory reforms.

In elementary and secondary education, the Department is improving its capacity to better serve states and communities as they seek to improve education. For example, the Department is reducing regulations and paperwork in new programs such as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which is being operated without regulations, and Title I of ESEA, where regulations are being dramatically reduced. In program monitoring, the Department is shifting from compliance to performance-from a focus on narrow reporting and audit-type requirements to one that provides flexibility to states and local school districts as they work to improve student performance. Another example is the creation of "area desks" within the Department, from which staff provide technical assistance and monitoring across categorical programs, thus enhancing state and local efforts to improve their entire education system.

In postsecondary education, the direct loan program is an example of reinventing government to deliver needed services at lower cost, with less bureaucracy, and with greater simplicity for the Department's customers. The initial stage of direct loan implementation has been extremely successful, with positive reviews from schools and students. And by the year 2000, the Direct Loan program will save taxpayers over $1 billion a year. In addition to implementing the new direct loan program, the Department has improved the management of all its student financial aid programs—reducing default rates and increasing loan collections.

In the past few years, substantial strides have been made toward transforming the Department into a more effective and efficient organization that can better serve its customers.

Other streamlining and reinvention efforts within the Department include providing educators, parents, and community leaders with easy access to information about programs and strategies to improve program effectiveness.

The Department has proposed elimination of 86 programs and is committed to a 50 percent reduction in its discretionary grant regulations. The Department is also streamlining the grant award process by eliminating 6,000 unnecessary negotiations a year, notifying grantees earlier, and distributing grant funds electronically.

These management improvements are only the first steps in a long-term effort to be more responsive to customers and effectively promote education improvements.

Internet users can access the Department's online library in the following ways:

- World Wide Web browser such as Mosaic or Lynx
  (URL = http://www.ed.gov)

- Gopher client
  (gopher to gopher.ed.gov)

  or select North->USA->General->U.S. Department of Education from all other gophers

- FTP client
  (ftp to ftp.ed.gov)
  Log on as anonymous.

- E-mail
  (send message to almanac@inet.ed.gov)
  Type "send catalog" in the body of the message. Avoid the use of signature blocks and leave the subject line blank.

For information and publications about U.S. Department of Education programs and activities, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.